

# WORDS & VISION

UFV FACULTY AND STAFF ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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**SPECIAL**  
Edition

## Slipping off the tracks...

This special edition of *Words and Vision* is the first of two that are designed to focus on some immediate and significant

workplace issues. These events are part of management's concentrated effort to neutralize your union's effectiveness in representing you. This takes shape in a number of ways that is explored in this special edition by your chief negotiator, Colleen Bell, and your president, Sean Parkinson. While I argue that no one is going to single-handedly save union members from abuse and overwork, Colleen suggests that we have become accustomed to problematic and unhealthy management practices, while Sean provides some very tangible examples of how prevailing administrative attitudes and behaviours are egregiously derailing the relationship between the FSA and UFV. Even more alarming is that these actions are hurting employees in very material ways. Comparing UFV to the human body, Colleen illustrates how the concept of solidarity can be used to inoculate employees from greater harm and strengthen UFV with a renewed sense of purpose and vision.

**Christina Neigel** | Acting  
Communications Chair



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Christina Neigel | Acting Communications Chair

# UFV is Off Its Rails

Recently deceased scholar Peter Freund points to a simple yet troubling reality, “work time has not declined with increased productivity” [1]. In fact, the “advancements” of the last several decades have led to “the intensification and extension of work, the blurring of work and free time, casualisation, precariousness, self-exploitation and self-marketing” [2]. What this means to you, a member of the FSA, is that many of the problems you face at work, including struggles with workload, are not problems that you are going to solve by simply taking mindfulness classes or more fitness classes (which, ironically, is just more “stuff” that must be shoehorned into your life). The morale issues facing UFV employees are tied to the increasingly inhumane ways the institutional structures around us inform our working experiences. This is exacerbated by a more sinister and willful pursuit to control and homogenize our workforce through intimidation and obfuscating decisions/processes.

While we can use our own personal agency to resist by supporting “the slowing down of life ... to reduce the alienating nature of production/consumption activities”[3], we need to also acknowledge how our oppression (and, yes, I truly believe we are experiencing various forms of oppression here), devalues us, the service work that is tied to what we do at UFV, and our activities outside of UFV. This is important for many reasons but here are two particularly pertinent ones: (1) this situation is bad for your physical well-being as workers at UFV and (2) as a place of higher learning, we send a powerful message to students that there is no hope for empowerment in the pursuit of education because we, the educators, have none.

There are endless examples of how your FSA representatives have been confronting dishonest, misguided, insincere, and, even, unkind acts. However, without the total weight of the association’s membership and a willingness for all members to stand, should-to-shoulder in defence of fellow members, your working lives are not likely to improve. Contrary to the wealth of Western popular culture narratives of superheroes, there are none. There is no magic behind bargaining, representing aggrieved members, and organizing. There is only hard work and a willingness to find common ground so that we can work together.

It is possible resist efforts that divide us as a workforce but this requires us to check in with ourselves and with our colleagues to ensure that we do not engage in undermining behaviours. We need to work *smarter* by recognizing when working *more* may be degrading our quality of life, our ability to seek compensation, and our relationships with our students and colleagues. I challenge all members to consider the importance of standing with your colleagues in the FSA when called upon (i.e. attending forums, participating in bargaining surveys, attending bargaining, voting, etc.). After all, the FSA is the only formal body that **acts on your behalf** to represent you as a working *person*.

1. Freund, P. (2010). Capitalism, time-space, environment, and human wellbeing: Envisioning ecosocialist temporality and spatiality. *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 21:2, 116. doi: 10.1080/10455752.2010.489684



@doctor\_deception

2. Allmer, T. (2018). “Precarious, always-on and flexible: A case study of academics as information workers. *European Journal of Communication*, 33(4), 382. doi: 10.1177/0267323118783794
3. Freund. (2010). p. 119

## Mind Games

ACCOMMODATION	TRUST	S O L I D A T R I T Y N R X D C Y Y R G
AGREEMENT	UNION	Q R S H S G S T X S X O H D O B T T R D
BALANCE	UNITY	R E P R E S E N T A T I O N C E I I G L
BENEFITS	WAGES	J I T V Q G N V J B M T A M U N U N X K
DOCUMENTATION	WORK	N Z N T R U O B A L Z A U T M E Q U F E
EQUITY		M O I T C B H I D E A D J O E F E R W D
FAIRNESS		P L I N E K R O W I W I G G N I E F C F
HONEST		G J G T F G I O L E I M T E T T P O R A
INFORMATION		T W I U A O R G B D O I R T A S R C B I
INTEGRITY		U N I O N D R I L Q Q T O H T S K A R R
INTIMIDATION		M O R A L E O M T G B N P E I U L H U N
LABOUR		D A Y E B D W M A Y F I P R O A E G T E
MORALE		L W E Q W L V S M T V F U Z N J X N F S
POWER		T R U S T O E R Q O I M S C Q L E L S S
REPRESENTATION		F E G V P G P Y J I C O E R R M D Q I I
RIGHTS		T N E R A P S N A R T C N H E I B M D R
STABILITY		V P Q W Q Q F U O F U K A E W A G N F M
STRENGTH		F H A D S T R E N G T H R D U Y P H Q B
SUPPORT		S T A B I L I T Y C J G W E Q F H G T R
TOGETHER		R B K X A K P Z C L A Z Q W E B T V V S
TRANSPARENT		

Hidden word revealed when puzzle is completed. Answer on page 4.





# Heroes Will Not Save You

Sean Parkinson | President

It is hard to believe our employer is sincere in caring about its community when the FSA has been afflicted with an expanding list of employer-union issues, largely fueled by misinformation, lack of transparency, disregard for process, and an eagerness to wield managerial power. Below are some samples of activities that are leading to a heightening discord between the FSA and the Employer:

## 1. Ongoing Employer interference with the administration of a trade union

As you will recall, the Labour Relations Board found the employer at fault in violating section 6 (interference with the administration of a trade union) of the Labour Code (see [http://www.lrb.bc.ca/decisions/B024\\$2018.pdf](http://www.lrb.bc.ca/decisions/B024$2018.pdf)). The attitudes towards the FSA and its members that fueled this bizarre and egregious event persist. The kind of behaviours fueling interference can be overt, as in this example, but they can also be less obvious and can include behaviours like excluded members “suggesting” certain members run for FSA office, expressing “disappointment” in the tone of union newsletters, delaying action/communications to try to “time-out” grievances, and so on.

In a recent and extremely troubling development, a former UFV employee had their grievance refused to be heard at an arbitration board, because too much time had passed between the end of the UFV-FSA grievance process and the appointment of an arbitrator. In a preliminary objection to the arbitrator UFV claimed they thought the FSA had abandoned the grievance. While the arbitrator hearing the objection found the FSA had not missed any timelines in the collective agreement in processing the grievance, in his opinion the delay to appoint an arbitrator was harmful to the employer’s case. This particular case transpired during the period in which the FSA was embroiled in its own complaint about employer interference (the case above) which had an immeasurable impact on its operations. Further the FSA was significantly (and negatively) affected by internal conflict within the executive and its reporting processes.

## 2. FSA Struggles to Protect Member Finances

Beginning with a valid request for information to the UFV administration to explain extremely high and confounding charges to the FSA, the FSA has been engaged in a financial dispute over more than 100,000 dollars in charges.

These charges relate to the replacement costs of those released to the union as executive officers. In addition to being charged for workers who are no longer officers, and have not been since fall 2017, there are serious questions around the calculation of additional accounting fees relating to the processing of releases. In the interest of being financially responsible for membership funds, the Secretary Treasurer has sought details on how such charges are calculated. Since asking for this, invoices to the union have become *less* clear.

Communications are framed in vague terms, sometimes pointing to selective articles in the collective agreement in a manner that

offers no clarity. Despite repeated requests for detailed interpretations and calculations, responses are egregiously slow and mired in double-speak that cannot be confidently understood. For example, since the FSA requested additional information on invoices from UFV in May 2018, the FSA has been charged 34.75% percent on replacement salaries (up from 20.75%). The FSA has taken the position that it “has no problem satisfying its obligations” but it cannot “determine the appropriateness of these charges without a more detailed itemization” (internal communication, November 25, 2018). In February 2019, the FSA secretary treasurer has had to reiterate to administration, “Your lack of response to our request not only limits my ability to determine our accordance with item 2.6(f) of the Collective Agreement and limits my ability to serve as a steward of member resources ... Please, just show us this *calculation*” (internal communication, February 6, 2019).

## 3. Intimidation

This can take many forms including having your activities “monitored” electronically or physically. For example, some have observed that staff are “spied on” during breaks or told who they may congregate with on such breaks. Others have been asked to take down messages posted in their personal social media activities. In one case a UFV employee refused to hand over a personal hard drive and was summarily dismissed as being insubordinate. Despite the fact that all of these examples violate the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the threat of being terminated has a powerful, coercive effect. No one wants to lose their job or be mired in a libel lawsuit (even if it is vexatious or spurious) and this is why intimidation works. One strategy of resistance (seen at UFV) is mass departures. Another effect appears in recruitment.

## 4. Expanding Managerial Reach

Micromanaging and the exertion of managerial rights is another area of FSA member strife. For staff this manifests most significantly as increasing surveillance that looks like greater oversight of daily work, reduced flexibility in scheduling, and “enhanced” reporting. Faculty experience this as well. In one recent example, faculty have been required to provide the dean with student grades under the pretense that there are quality control issues. Not only does this violate UFV’s internal policies relating to instructional responsibilities and privacy protections for students who are assured grading information travels only between the registrar and instructors, this creates a sense that faculty are not able to perform their work independently.

In another example, Human Resources is appointing an investigator to look into academic work that was submitted by a faculty member some time ago. This is highly irregular considering a) the time since the work was submitted b) that there is an internal oversight structure within the committee that receives the work and c) the unwillingness to disclose details of the investigation to the FSA.

While there are many other labour issues at play between UFV and the FSA, the examples here offer members some insight into the complexity of our present circumstances. Our effectiveness in dealing with workplace issues is contingent on member solidarity — *your* solidarity. Last year, the FSA brought forward an operational review, pointing to recommendations that may serve to strengthen the association. This year we will enter into bargaining. While it may difficult to envision this process, it is likely not hard to see how uneven the playing field is and the need for members to support one another and their executive. Who you elect and how you participate matter enormously to your personal working conditions.



# Solidarity Is Not a Dirty Word

**Colleen Bell** | Chief Negotiator

Recently, we asked you to identify your top workplace issue. A small number of you said, “Everything’s good” — and we’re really happy to hear that things are working well for you. But most of those who responded shared at least one workplace issue, and a lot — far too many — of your concerns point to an unhealthy (some used the word “toxic”) workplace. You shared concerns such as:

- My manager doesn’t respond to my emails.
- My manager doesn’t trust me to be able to do my job.
- I feel micro-managed.
- I feel like I have no autonomy in the workplace.
- I don’t feel that my voice matters in decisions that affect me or my department.
- I don’t feel supported or respected.
- I wish we could return to the community and collegiality we used to have.

All of these are serious concerns. We have expectations of our workplace — an environment where we feel valued and supported by our management and our co-workers — and those expectations are clearly not being met for most of us. The last statement implies that our workplace wasn’t always like this, that at one time we had a shared purpose and worked together to achieve it.

So, what happened? I have a theory.

Consider, if you will, the human body — another complex organism. When the human body is starved of food, it goes into survival mode. It uses up stored energy (i.e., fat) first, and when that’s gone, it starts attacking lean muscle and organs.

Our workplace, like the human body, is a complex organism. I believe that 16 years of government starvation of the BC post-secondary system led those with authority — our administration and Board of Governors — into starvation mode. They went after supplies and services first, and then, when they couldn’t contain those costs further,

they started attacking the lean muscle and organs, or, in other words, the workers (us!). Workers cost money, and cost containment (aka “salary savings”) appears to have been their primary survival strategy.

The problem with this logic, however, is that administrators and managers cost money, too, and while the workers have starved, the administrators have not — their ranks have grown steadily since UFV became a university in 2008. And they continue to grow. [1]

It’s difficult to argue that the university is still starving. New administrative positions, plus annual operating surpluses since 2012, point to a healthy balance sheet. Our administration would likely claim that any surpluses come from unanticipated international student tuition (those numbers have grown almost as fast as those of our management), but while that may be part of it, the surpluses are also the result of not spending on operational needs, aka the workers (us!).

But I believe that management has been in starvation mode so long that they now see it as normal. And the only way to fight that perspective is with solidarity. [2] I know that the concept of solidarity is uncomfortable for some — it took me quite a few years to make peace with the idea — but it is the best way to show strength to the employer, because when one of us suffers, we all suffer. And while each of us may have a different concern or issue in relation to the workplace, most of us desire a workplace where we feel valued and supported, where we feel that shared sense of purpose. That’s what we all have in common. That’s our solidarity.

“A university is its people.” [3] That’s the message from UFV’s president, Dr. Joanne MacLean. It’s a welcome message, and I do believe she is earnest and sincere about it. As we head into bargaining, it’s a message

we intend to remind the employer of at every opportunity. It’s time to reinvest in the university’s people — we’re ready, and we’re counting on you to help spread that message.

## Notes

[1] A perusal of current administrative job postings reveals 4 new exempt positions in IT Services, as well as a new exempt position in Risk and Safety. That’s on top of the creation of a Business Transformation Office last year, and an operations position in the President’s office.

[2] Solidarity is defined as “Unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group.” (*Oxford Living Dictionaries*, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/solidarity>)

[2] See Dr. MacLean’s discussion of her message in two documents: Part 1 (<https://blogs.ufv.ca/announce/files/2018/09/UFV-Part-1-A-university-is-its-people.pdf>) and Part 2 (<https://blogs.ufv.ca/announce/files/2018/09/UFV-Part-2-A-university-is-its-people.pdf>)

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